

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Simone Hasselmo. I am a resident from New Haven.

I stand in support of S.B. 284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need. But our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults.

I am a 4th year medical student at Yale School of Medicine. During my clinical training I've witnessed firsthand the plight of undocumented children facing medical emergencies and the ways that inability to access health insurance can send their families reeling. This has been particularly heightened during COVID, during which most of my clinical education has taken place.

On my 3rd year pediatric clerkship--training rotation--at Yale New Haven Hospital in October of 2020, my team was responsible for around 15 patients at any given time. For my entire month-long rotation, two of those patients were undocumented immigrants. Their stories were different--one was a six-year-old boy recovering from a rare disorder in which antibodies attacked receptors in his brain, causing him to lose motor and communication skills; the other was a teenage boy who spent several months in the hospital recovering and receiving tri-weekly hemodialysis after a COVID infection led him to develop MIS-C and ensuing damage to several vital organs. What was striking, though, were their similarities. Notably, at any given time, both of them were usually alone. The latter boy celebrated his fifteenth birthday with the floor's nurses in a hospital room decorated with streamers. I met both of their families, who were loving and attentive, who would not have left their child's side had it been up to them. Unfortunately, as a result of their children's lack of health insurance, both families had experienced several tumultuous months of uncertainty. Fear and confusion surrounding their children's diagnoses and prognoses were compounded by financial and pragmatic concerns; as neither was eligible for HUSKY at the time, both families had been advised to move to New York to access healthcare. Instead of being able to spend their time engaged in their children's care, comforting them and sharing special moments, both boys' parents were frantically undergoing the process of establishing residency in New York, finding places to live and new jobs to support their families, and often commuting for several hours a day across state lines for brief moments with their children. This also created challenges for the physicians responsible for the boys' care, necessitating the construction of whole new care teams in New York who would start the process of getting to know these boys all over again. These families called Connecticut home, but were unable to stay because of lack of access to health insurance. While

Connecticut has made great strides in expanding HUSKY to those under 8, the boy who celebrated his fifteenth birthday hooked up to a dialysis machine without family or friends by his side was decidedly still a child. In expanding HUSKY, Connecticut has the power to prevent children like him from going through world-shattering experiences scared and alone.

I feel lucky to live in a state where most people I interact with on a daily basis believe that healthcare is a human right that should be extended to everyone. Outside of the hospital, I've seen firsthand what having access to HUSKY has done for my partner, who recently became a part of the program and has been able to access vital services he never thought possible and take care of his health in a way that he never has been able to before. Our state has made great strides in extending HUSKY to some of our most vulnerable community members, but there is still a long way to go. This small state with a big heart must continue to extend its compassion as far as it can reach. I hope that someday all of my patients, neighbors, and friends will be able to access the care they need to survive and thrive. Senate Bill 284 is a vital first step toward achieving that goal.

I support S.B. 284 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,

Simone Hasselmo